



Colorblindness and Diversity: race frames and their consequences for white undergraduates at elite US universities

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Abstract

In this paper we bring together the literatures on frame analysis, the meaning of race, and campus racial climate to analyze the *race frames*—lenses through which individuals understand the role of race in society—held by white students attending elite US universities. For most, the elite university experience coincides with a strengthening or emergence of the *diversity frame*, which emphasizes the positive benefits of cultural diversity. Still, many also hold a *colorblind frame*, which sees race groups as equivalent and racial identities as insignificant. We highlight the ambivalence these divergent frames create for student perspectives on affirmative action and interracial contact on campus. Our findings demonstrate the mutability of race frames, and we highlight the impact institutions may have on individuals' race frames. The paper is based on in-depth interviews with 47 US-born white undergraduates attending Brown University and Harvard University.

Keywords: race, higher education, affirmative action, elites, colorblindness, culture

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NATASHA K. WARIKOO is Associate Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education.
ADDRESS: Gutman Library, 4th Floor, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA Email: natasha_warikoo@gse.harvard.edu

JANINE DE NOVAIS is Doctoral Candidate at Harvard Graduate School of Education.
ADDRESS: Gutman Library, 4th Floor, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA Email: jad600@mail.harvard.edu

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